

# **TRANSCRIPT**

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## **FLORIDA FARM BILL FORUM WITH UNDER SECRETARY, ERIC BOST ON WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2005. LOCATED AT 300 N.E. 2ND AVENUE, ETCOTA BUILDING, MIAMI-DADE COLLEGE, MIAMI, FLORIDA**

### APPEARANCES:

ERIC BOST, UNDER SECRETARY FOOD, NUTRITION AND CONSUMER SERVICES. DONALD ARNETTE, SOTHEAST REGIONAL ADMINISTRATION. JESSICA SHAHIN, DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR FOOD STAMP OFFICE.

1           Thereupon the forum had commenced as  
2           the court reporter set up and the following  
3           proceedings were transcribed.)

4           MR. BOST: Good afternoon and welcome.  
5           I'm Eric Bost, and I am the Food Nutrition and  
6           Consumer Services Under Secretary. This is one  
7           of several forums that we are having around the  
8           country in preparation and in anticipation of  
9           the Farm Bill Legislation that Congress will  
10          consider in 2007.

11          We have six titles that will be discussed,  
12          the Food Stamp Program, Food Distribution  
13          Program on the Indian reservations, Commodity  
14          Distribution Program, the Senior Farmers Market  
15          Program -- I'm missing one. Those are the  
16          programs, of course, with the largest being the  
17          Food Stamp Program.

18          One of the initiatives that the President  
19          and I talk about is insuring, before we put

20 together our ideas, to afford the public and  
21 any other interested party the opportunity to  
22 share with us their ideas about the programs  
23 that we administer on behalf of people in this  
24 country.

25 Of the 15 nutrition programs that we

1 administer, the largest, of course, is the Food  
2 Stamp Program, serving about 26 million  
3 Americans every month. Over half of those are  
4 children.

5 During the course of the last Food Stamp  
6 review which was in 2002, several major changes  
7 was made to the program and we will consider  
8 changes in '07. But this is not about us.  
9 This is about you.

10 This is the opportunity for you to share  
11 with us your opinions, recommendations,  
12 thoughts, visions, whatever, regarding the  
13 programs that we have a responsibility for  
14 implementing.

15 There are a couple of things that I would  
16 share with you. First and foremost, for all of  
17 the nutrition programs that we administer, one  
18 of our guiding principles has been to insure  
19 that eligible people have the opportunity to  
20 participate in our program and that we make it  
21 easier for them, easy for one, to access those  
22 programs and two, for our partners, that we  
23 make it easy for them to implement our programs  
24 without compromising the integrity that exists  
25 in our programs.

1           Those are guiding principles that remain  
2 true. And even as we go into '07 will still  
3 remain true in terms of recommendations that we  
4 will present to Congress in anticipation of  
5 their debate.

6           As I said, this is an opportunity for you  
7 to share with us your thoughts, your views.  
8 This isn't a debate. If I have questions I  
9 might ask you, but more than anything else we  
10 are here to listen.

11           I have Don Arnette, who is the regional  
12 administrator over at this shelter, and Jessica  
13 Shahin, who is the associate administrator with  
14 the Food Stamp Program, that are here with us  
15 today. And several other staff, Steve and  
16 Karen and others. And we are here to listen to  
17 what you have to say.

18           Mr. Arnette, I think, will establish the  
19 ground rules in terms of how we are going to do  
20 this. The one thing that I will say to you  
21 before I close is that, as I said before, we  
22 have had several of these around the country.  
23 One was held in Detroit yesterday. I will be  
24 doing one next week in Portland, Oregon.

25           We will roll the comments up. They will

1 be available on our website so that people from  
2 other places can hear what other people had to  
3 say and look at those similarities or  
4 differences that exist. And we anticipate  
5 being able to do that some time towards the end  
6 of the year or the first of the new year,  
7 because we will complete these hopefully by the  
8 middle of November.

9 So with that in mind, I will turn it over  
10 to Mr. Arnette and we will go ahead and get it  
11 started.

12 MR. ARNETTE: Thank you, Mr. Bost.  
13 Housekeeping issues for the day.

14 One, attendees that have written comments  
15 may leave them in the boxes designated for  
16 written comments. One is at the registration  
17 table and one is here in the forum area to my  
18 right.

19 Two, for attendees making oral statements,  
20 you were provided with a blue form with a  
21 number and a location by the left or right. If  
22 your card has a right then you will speak from  
23 the microphone on your right and those with the  
24 left will speak from the microphone on your  
25 left.

1           Three, at the front of the room Karen Dean  
2 will hold up a card with a number on it. That  
3 will be your cue to move to the line, so that  
4 you will be ready to speak when your turn  
5 comes.

6           Four, before you begin to make your  
7 statement, please state your name, your  
8 affiliation and provide your city and state.

9           Five, originally we had allotted a time  
10 limit of three to five minutes. However, it  
11 appears that we will have ample time to  
12 accommodate everyone if your comments exceed  
13 five minutes.

14           If time becomes an issue Karen, on my  
15 right, will hold up a yield sign for you to  
16 begin concluding your comments.

17                           (Laughter.)

18           MR. BOST: And more importantly, if you  
19 try to ignore it I'm going to tell you to sit  
20 down.

21                           (Laughter.)

22           MR. ARNETTE: And that will be after she  
23 has shown you a stop sign, you must end your  
24 comments.

25           Lastly, we will take a short break around

1 2:45 p.m., but if you need to leave the forum  
2 before that time, please feel free to do so.

3 So with that, Mr. Secretary, we are ready  
4 to begin the conference itself. Karen, could  
5 you call the first one.

6 MS. MILES: I'm Linda Miles and I'm with  
7 the Florida Department of Elder Affairs in  
8 Tallahassee and I'm representing the Senior  
9 Commerce Program and Nutrition Program.

10 (Inaudible) has increased the income of farmers  
11 nationwide by expanding access to fresh fruits  
12 and vegetables to low income seniors in our  
13 community.

14 This program operates in 47 states,  
15 territories and organizations nationwide.  
16 There are over 15,000 small vegetable farmers  
17 and 2,400 farmers market and 170 roadside  
18 stands that utilize this program nationwide.

19 In 2005 states funding requests were over  
20 28 million. This was almost double the  
21 available funds provided by the current Farm  
22 Bill.

23 Florida has a very small program that is  
24 currently operating in seven counties. This  
25 year we had 205 growers that were participating

1 in our program. Our funding, which was  
2 supplemented by a state vitamin settlement  
3 antitrust grant allowed us to serve 3300  
4 eligible seniors. However, with our  
5 supplemental grant ending next year, we will be  
6 needing additional funds in 2007 in order to  
7 prevent a reduction in the number of seniors we  
8 are currently serving.

9 In getting ready for this I wanted to go  
10 over some aging Florida population data and I  
11 was overwhelmed and I'm sure you will be too.

12 In the year 2000 there were over 700,000  
13 Floridians age 65 or over with incomes below  
14 (inaudible) poverty. This number represented  
15 25.8 percent of the total population age 65 or  
16 older. The 2005 census data now reports there  
17 are 3.1 million Floridians age 65 or older, and  
18 if we are assuming a similar poverty rate we  
19 now have about 800,000 Floridians who that are  
20 65 or over with incomes below (inaudible)  
21 percent poverty.

22 Florida is the second largest senior  
23 population in the country. I believe  
24 California has 5 million.

25 So as this stands confirms, there is a

1       tremendous and growing need in Florida to  
2       expand the Senior Commerce Market Nutrition  
3       Program. This program has many strengths and  
4       I'm going to bring out two that I find real  
5       important. It's a very fiscally sound program.  
6       The administrative cost associated with this  
7       program are kept to a minimum, allowing the  
8       majority of the funding to actually reach the  
9       farmer.

10             My background happens to be in nutrition,  
11       so the second part I'm particularly interested  
12       in. The Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition  
13       Program is a health promotion disease  
14       prevention program. It addresses the  
15       nutritional needs of a high risk population  
16       that is expected to reach 71.5 million by the  
17       year 2030.

18             This program provides low income seniors  
19       financial resources that will allow them to  
20       increase their consumption of fresh fruits and  
21       vegetables and improve their overall  
22       nutritional status. We know that improving our  
23       nutritional status reduces the risk of chronic  
24       disease and may have a positive financial  
25       impact on healthcare cost.

1           On January 12th, 2005 HHS Secretary Tommy  
2           Thompson and USDA Secretary Ann Veneman  
3           released the 2005 dietary guidelines. These  
4           guidelines provide science-based advice to  
5           promote health and to reduce the risk of major  
6           chronic diseases through diet and physical  
7           activity. The dietary guidelines recommend  
8           that Americans consume four and a half cups,  
9           which is nine servings a day of fruits and  
10          vegetables.

11          We also know that major causes of  
12          immobility and mortality in the United States  
13          are related to a poor diet and sedentary  
14          lifestyle. Seven out of ten Americans who die  
15          each year, which is more than 1.7 million, die  
16          of a chronic disease and more than 90 million  
17          Americans live with chronic diseases.

18          Chronic disease accounts for more than  
19          75 percent of the nation's \$1.4 trillion we  
20          spend on healthcare. In the elderly  
21          population, 88 percent of people over 65 have  
22          at least one chronic health condition and  
23          21 percent of chronic disability.

24          In summary, the Senior Farmer's Market  
25          Nutrition Program makes a positive difference

1 to the farmer and the senior consumer. I hope  
2 that as future opportunities arise you will  
3 consider providing additional funds for our  
4 farmers and seniors through the Senior Farmer's  
5 Market Nutritional Program.

6 Thank you.

7 MR. CAHILL: I'm Paul Cahill from Cahill  
8 Ministries Food Bank in Lakeland, Florida and  
9 we are part of the TEFAP Program. I would like  
10 to just -- I want to first thank you for the  
11 opportunity for having us allow to share with  
12 you this morning.

13 I want to speak for reimbursement for  
14 expenses. Under the current method,  
15 reimbursement for expenses is a verification of  
16 expenses. I want to go over a couple of things  
17 here. Under the current method number one, is  
18 very time consuming. And number two, it has  
19 very high limitations and draw backs.

20 To give you an example on that, purchases  
21 in this current program cannot exceed \$5,000.  
22 We distribute over a quarter of a million of  
23 pounds of food a month.

24 For example, we desperately need a second  
25 forklift. The one we have was purchased used.

1 It's very old and it's used eight hours a day.  
2 There are many occasions we need two forklifts  
3 running at the same time. A good forklift  
4 cannot be purchased for under \$5,000 and that's  
5 even a used one at that.

6 The second thing is purchases under the  
7 current program from a thousand to five  
8 thousand dollars need prior approval before  
9 purchasing. Example, request to purchase two  
10 electric pallet jacks at \$4,900 each four  
11 months ago was denied. In the last four months  
12 we have spent over \$8,000 in repairs. We still  
13 need two electric pallet jacks.

14 Under the current system recipient  
15 agencies receive all this free food and  
16 therefore cuts into the finances that we have  
17 to operate on. Even though we are nonprofit  
18 our expenses do run \$40,000 a month. There has  
19 always been an encouragement of delivery and we  
20 really need as many of the recipient agencies  
21 coming into the food banks so they can get the  
22 product first to continue to operate and still  
23 work the way it needs to be done to the  
24 fullest.

25 There are two methods of reimbursement

1       that are available. The verification of  
2       expenses is the current method and there is  
3       also the verification per case allocation  
4       distribution. Our recommendation is the per  
5       case distribution -- reimbursement at six  
6       dollars a case in order to effectively run the  
7       program to its fullest. Thank you very much.

8           MR. GILMER: Good afternoon. I'm Ray  
9       Gilmer, Director of Public Affairs for the  
10       Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association. We  
11       are based in Orlando. We represent the fruit  
12       and vegetable growers here in the state.  
13       Welcome to Florida. I also speak to you today  
14       as a member of the board of the prestigious  
15       Produce for Better Health Foundation, the  
16       organization that administers the 5 A Day  
17       Program, which promotes eating five fruits and  
18       vegetables a day for better health.

19           I want to thank you and your staff of the  
20       USDA for the ongoing support of 5 A Day and the  
21       work and the recent development of dietary  
22       guidelines and the new MyPyramid Program.

23           Obviously, health sciences suggest the  
24       promotion of the fruit and vegetable  
25       consumption helps Americans live healthier

1 lives but the economics suggest it also helps  
2 American producers like ones that I represent  
3 here in Florida who are currently trying to  
4 batten down the hatches and put things away  
5 before the weather gets bad.

6 The 2007 Farm Bill is a great vehicle for  
7 implementation of policy that will help  
8 accomplish both objectives for nutrition as  
9 well as help American farmers. When you  
10 consider Americans on average get about three  
11 and a half daily servings of fruits and  
12 vegetables, it's clear that we need to do more  
13 to promote produce consumption. The new  
14 MyPyramid site is a wonderful tool for finding  
15 individual recommendations and helps the  
16 consumers to make the right choices about what  
17 they eat. It would be hard to plug in  
18 anybody's data and get only a three-serving  
19 recommendation. So we clearly need to do more.

20 All we need is reduction to the new  
21 dietary guidelines and the new pyramid. The  
22 produce industry encouraged promotion of the  
23 Health Foundation to look at fresh ways to  
24 communicate the message to American consumers.  
25 It's a retuning of the 5 A Day grant, if you

1 will, and as part of that process we conducted  
2 some new research with American consumers,  
3 especially moms, in a handful of cities to  
4 learn attitudes about fruit and vegetable  
5 consumption including retail experiences,  
6 preparation outfits and their goals for their  
7 healthy lifestyle.

8 We didn't just ask the questions, we spent  
9 the day with them. We went shopping with them.

10 We prepared breakfast and got ready for work  
11 and school and tried to get into their heads  
12 about how they organized their meals and how  
13 they were able to get everybody fed during the  
14 day.

15 So here is some of what we found, to share  
16 some of that with you. People noticed that  
17 they wanted to make changes to their diets, but  
18 being told to double or triple their current  
19 consumption just didn't resonate with them.

20 They said they had a greater affinity for  
21 dietary recommendations which were more doable.

22 People responded to the message that every  
23 little step adds to a healthier lifestyle.

24 Many expressed guilt or frustration, especially  
25 moms, at not being able to meet the recommended

1 daily servings. So some encouragement about at  
2 least making a healthy start may help keep them  
3 motivated in response to future messages.

4 The recommendation of five, or nine or  
5 thirteen servings a day were perceived by the  
6 moms as unachievable and therefore not really  
7 motivated. So on the other hand, that suggests  
8 that the fruit and vegetable consumption should  
9 be a certain percentage of total daily intake,  
10 say, 50 percent, for example. It's easier and  
11 more comprehensive.

12 Moms we surveyed said that they trust  
13 their doctors medical groups and Oprah on the  
14 consumption of nutrition and they are skeptical  
15 of advertising. They said we can't really  
16 expect them to respond to scare tactics or our  
17 preaching to them. We need to treat moms and  
18 other consumers as allies for a campaign  
19 America. They want to be there. They just  
20 want help.

21 So how does this translate to some  
22 recommendations for the Farm Bill? Well, USDA  
23 and Congress can help these moms and consumers  
24 in general get more fruits and vegetables in  
25 their diet and you've got a great start with

1 the MyPyramid Program. We are telling her this  
2 is what they should be eating, but they need  
3 more help to reach those goals, whether it be  
4 for cash purposes, Food Stamp programs, food  
5 service choices or other things.

6 One was to help establish a new fruit and  
7 vegetable domestic marketing program to enhance  
8 competitiveness and provide consumers with  
9 information about the many benefits of fruits  
10 and vegetables. This will be a federal  
11 matching program patterned after the current  
12 market access program that's used for promoting  
13 export markets. And it would be matching funds  
14 administered directly by the USDA in which the  
15 produce industry marketing boards, commissions,  
16 not-for-profit organizations and grower  
17 cooperatives could develop domestic marketing  
18 programs to increase fruit and vegetable  
19 consumption and apply for matching funds from  
20 the government based on the market expanding.

21 Now because the fruit and vegetable  
22 industry is so diverse and most individual  
23 commodity groups are relatively small, it's  
24 difficult to generate the kind of marketing  
25 wherewithal to promote a single product,

1 especially when you consider many larger food  
2 marketers that are out there that we are  
3 competing with.

4 And secondly, I encourage you to strongly  
5 consider developing a research agenda that goes  
6 beyond the very specific nutrients and focuses  
7 on research that's available now, and focuses  
8 more on the health benefits of fruits and  
9 vegetables.

10 Plus, if we are really going to put the  
11 needle on fruit and vegetable consumption, we  
12 need a much more comprehensive consumer  
13 behavior research program, like some of the  
14 very minor research that I delivered to you  
15 today, that assess barriers to increased  
16 consumption of fruits and vegetables, things  
17 such as convenience, concerns about spoilage,  
18 preparation and cost. This would greatly  
19 assist us in our efforts to drive healthier  
20 eating patterns.

21 And with that knowledge in hand we could  
22 find funding for development of packaging and  
23 delivery systems to make it easier for kids and  
24 adults to choose fruits and vegetables for  
25 snacks and meals on the run. Every little bit

1 will help.

2 So thanks for your attention in this  
3 important issue. I look forward to working  
4 with you and your staff in the months ahead and  
5 with Congress as the produce industry,  
6 nutrition experts, healthcare and scientific  
7 communities develop a healthy America in the  
8 Farm Bill for 2007. Thank you.

9 MR. WIEDMAN: Good afternoon. My name is  
10 Julie Wiedman and I'm from Second Harvest Food  
11 Bank of Central Florida and I'm a fellow  
12 (inaudible). I am so pleased to have the  
13 opportunity to be here this afternoon. I thank  
14 you very much and Second Harvest Food Bank of  
15 Central Florida is an affiliate of America's  
16 Second Harvest and I urge you to resist making  
17 any further budget cuts to the Farm Bill.

18 Hurricane Katrina and the recent disasters  
19 highlighted the needs that we have for the USDA  
20 nutritional programs, but we face the need  
21 every day in our mission to fight hunger in  
22 Central Florida. And the Food Stamp Program is  
23 a vital tool in that fight.

24 So I would first like to express my  
25 gratitude at the USDA's quick response to the

1 recent disasters. The Food Stamp emergency  
2 allotments were there immediately for the  
3 evacuees in Central Florida and we appreciate  
4 that. The disaster response worked very well.

5 However, in our everyday fight we find  
6 that the USDA must raise the minimum Food Stamp  
7 allotment level. Food Stamps last the average  
8 family two weeks out of the month and the other  
9 two weeks of the month they are going to food  
10 pantries. They are going to soup kitchens. It  
11 places extra stress on the people that serve,  
12 you know, food pantries and soup kitchens. And  
13 the clients can't afford eat healthy meals,  
14 because we all know that fruits and vegetables  
15 are more expensive than a box of macaroni or  
16 they are on a tight budget that they cannot  
17 afford fruits and vegetables or anything  
18 nutritional.

19 And we also urge you to conduct for  
20 outreach. In Florida only 54 percent of  
21 eligible persons received Food Stamps in the  
22 last fiscal year. That's not very many. If  
23 people don't know that they are qualified,  
24 especially the elderly, the most underserved,  
25 but we need to get the word out there that more

1 people are eligible to receive these benefits.

2 And the program also needs to improve its  
3 customer service and accessibility. I have had  
4 the opportunity to speak with many clients who  
5 are eligible to receive Food Stamps and they  
6 choose not to because it's too much of a hassle  
7 to deal with the Food Stamp office, or they  
8 cannot get there. The clients don't have  
9 transportation. So I have seen programs such  
10 as Access that have helped very much, you know,  
11 accessibility, bring the Food Stamps to the  
12 food pantries where the clients are, help them  
13 to get the Food Stamps, but we need more  
14 outreach and we need -- the process needs to be  
15 simplified for administrators and for the  
16 recipients.

17 I was honored to personally meet and  
18 interview around 50 recipients of Food Stamps.  
19 America's Second Harvest did a national hunger  
20 study and it's called Hunger in America 2005.  
21 The results will be out at the end of the year.

22 I had the opportunity to meet with a  
23 single mother of two at a local food pantry in  
24 Central Florida, and she took 20 minutes of her  
25 time. The interview was very personal. I

1 often wondered why clients were answering the  
2 questions. I don't know if I would do the same  
3 if I was in their situation, if I would sit  
4 down with somebody and answer very personal  
5 questions for 20 minutes. And she got very  
6 emotional and I did a number of these  
7 interviews and I wanted to do something  
8 immediate for her. She said the only thing she  
9 wanted was for people to know what it was like  
10 to be a single mother of two and try to feed  
11 your family nutritiously. And that it's not  
12 possible when you receive Food Stamps. And she  
13 just hoped that the word would get out and  
14 other families would not have to go through the  
15 same thing.

16 So I would leave you with that. Thanks  
17 for your time.

18 MS. DUKES: Good afternoon. My name is  
19 Shannon Dukes and I'm a graduate student at  
20 Florida International University in the  
21 Nutrition and Diabetes Program here in Miami.  
22 I'm presenting comments on behalf of the 70,000  
23 member American Diabetes Association, the  
24 nation's largest food (inaudible) and nutrition  
25 professionals.

1           The public needs an uncompromising  
2           commitment to advance nutrition knowledge and  
3           to help people use that knowledge to maintain  
4           and improve their health. Millions of  
5           Americans benefit from the USDA nutrition  
6           programs, yet we still have hunger in the  
7           United States. It is ironic that hunger  
8           continues, given our national epidemic of  
9           overweight and obesity. And over weight and  
10          obesity are now recognized as the largest  
11          manifestation of malnutrition in the United  
12          States today.

13          So the next Farm Bill needs to address  
14          four key issues. USDA nutrition assistant  
15          programs must be adequately funded to serve all  
16          of those in need. The nutritional (inaudible)  
17          that all Americans need are higher priority  
18          overall. This should be done by increasing,  
19          rather than cutting funds for nutrition  
20          assistance and other FNS Programs.

21          There is a need to increase and sustain  
22          USDA investment in nutrition education and  
23          nutrition research. There is also a serious  
24          need to keep the food supply up to date as it  
25          is essential to researchers and the American

1 public.

2 If we expect Americans to take personal  
3 responsibility for making healthy food and  
4 lifestyle choices, they need to be adequately  
5 prepared to do so. USDA must invest in more  
6 nutrition research and nutrition education to  
7 give Americans the ability to make sound  
8 nutrition decisions based on sound science.

9 The federal government has a mandate to  
10 support research on food needs of its  
11 population and to develop dietary as a basis  
12 for all federal nutrition programs. We commend  
13 them for the most recent work on the MyPyramid  
14 and the 2005 (inaudible).

15 We urge you not to shortchange the public  
16 by cutting funds for good nutrition programs  
17 such as Food Stamps, school meals and other  
18 programs.

19 Applied research documenting the benefits  
20 of these programs and healthy diets in general  
21 is also well worth our dollars as taxpayers.

22 Thank you.

23 MS. GIBBONS: Good afternoon. My name is  
24 Juanita Gibbons. I'm with Destiny Food Depot  
25 in Orlando, Florida. We are a faith-based

1 organization. We do not receive funding from  
2 the government or anyone else and our motto is  
3 a hand up, not a hand out. That does not mean  
4 that we don't service many people who come in  
5 crisis who have absolutely no money, but we try  
6 to make partnerships with people that are in  
7 need and so they pay a very small suggested  
8 donation for the foods that they get. We have  
9 meats and dry foods and vegetables. And we are  
10 also an access center, which is working  
11 wonderfully, because so many working families  
12 that would -- that are eligible, but would  
13 never go and stand for hours at one of the DCF  
14 centers trying to see if they are eligible.

15 We are open six days a week. They will  
16 come to purchase foods and at the same time  
17 they will do the access and so many of them are  
18 eligible and it definitely helps.

19 We started as just an adjunct to our  
20 church. A small 3,000-foot area on  
21 September 1st of 2001 and 911 hit ten days  
22 later. We went from servicing about 150 people  
23 to 600 families that first month and we since  
24 have moved and we opened up two other centers  
25 in two other counties, Orlando, Osceola and

1 Brevard. And we service 30,000 families now.  
2 Just in our Orlando center we service 3- to 400  
3 families a week.

4 Our biggest problem has come with the USDA  
5 and Farm Share. We used to get a lot more  
6 vegetables that we could provide for the people  
7 from Farm Shares and their funding got cut and  
8 so we get very little of that.

9 USDA, it's been so difficult to get USDA.  
10 We haven't had USDA in three years almost. We  
11 got it the first year and with the hurricanes  
12 the amount of the people that we are servicing  
13 from these hurricanes are still in need, not  
14 just the ones in Florida but the Katrina  
15 victims that have come over. We've seen a  
16 tremendous increase just in the last two months  
17 with the Katrina victims. And it's very  
18 difficult to continue to service the people.  
19 So many of our other sister agencies like us  
20 have just folded, because they couldn't afford  
21 to stay open.

22 We need to make USDA more accessible to  
23 the small community agencies and the  
24 faith-based organizations, how to get it. I  
25 know that we applied to some people who have

1 had it and they denied us because we do not  
2 give the food away, but so many of the  
3 agencies, and we studied this, are closed  
4 because they depended totally on donations and  
5 people's desire to donate. They just have  
6 different projects and the people are still  
7 there that need to eat. These families and  
8 seniors and single parents that need to feed  
9 their children.

10 I'm a registered nurse by profession and I  
11 was a visiting nurse for nine years. And I  
12 have been into these homes and I've seen how  
13 people eat because they don't have in money, so  
14 I encourage that you make USDA more accessible  
15 to the small agencies. Thank you.

16 MS. INGRAM: Good afternoon. My name is  
17 Frankie Ingram. I am the chief Commodities  
18 Manager for Farm Share. Farm Share was  
19 established in 1992. We recover fresh fruits  
20 and vegetables donated to us by the Florida  
21 farmers and administer the USDA TEFAP Program  
22 in Miami-Dade County, Broward County, Palm  
23 Beach County and Desoto County.

24 We serve approximately 25,000 households  
25 per months. We operate with a handful of

1 volunteers, a small staff of 15 employees and  
2 up to 24 inmates that we receive from the  
3 Florida Department of Corrections. And we do  
4 not charge any fees for our services to the  
5 recipients or the agencies.

6 First, I would like to thank you,  
7 Mr. Secretary, for allowing us to exchange FSA  
8 dry milk into -- to convert it to other  
9 products, such as stable shelf tomato soup,  
10 stable shelf liquid milk and chocolate pudding,  
11 which enhances our TEFAP Program.

12 In addition to distributing TEFAP  
13 commodities to faith-based organizations and  
14 community-based nonprofit organizations in our  
15 four counties, we have a successful and a  
16 unique program at Farm Share. Our distribution  
17 program we call the IDC, which is the  
18 Individual Distribution Center.

19 We serve approximately 5,000 individual  
20 families who reside south of Miller Drive  
21 monthly at our site in Homestead, Florida. The  
22 process is new recipients may sign up any  
23 Tuesday or Thursday from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.  
24 They will need a picture ID and documentation  
25 that shows that they live south of Miller

1 Drive. They complete the TEFAP certification  
2 eligibility form to take home, which is valid  
3 for one year. Recipients receive a Farm Share  
4 card and an appointment slip to come to our  
5 Homestead location on Monday, Wednesday or  
6 Friday between the hours of 9:30 and 3:00 p.m.  
7 And every first Saturday of the month we  
8 accommodate those families who also work Monday  
9 through Friday.

10 We use a software program called Office  
11 Hours Appointment Schedule, and that's a  
12 schedule that the doctors use to schedule their  
13 patients for appointments, which keeps us up to  
14 date with the people we serve and about how  
15 many times they get food from us each month and  
16 keep those records.

17 Each recipient can come once a month.  
18 Sometimes they have an alternate if they cannot  
19 come. And we serve a lot of elderly people who  
20 sometimes other family members can come and  
21 pick up food for them.

22 What are the benefits of this program? It  
23 prevents long lines and improves the quality of  
24 life for elderly and disabled recipients.  
25 Reasonable pick-up days and times. Each

1 recipient receives the same allocation.  
2 Recipients receive fresh fruits and vegetables  
3 donated by the farmers in addition to their  
4 monthly TEFAP commodities.

5 A Farm Share priority to me would be to  
6 expand our individual distribution center to  
7 accommodate the TEFAP families north of Miller  
8 Drive in Miami-Dade County, and operate similar  
9 distribution sites in Broward and Palm Beach  
10 Counties and perhaps throughout the state of  
11 Florida using a pilot program.

12 Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for giving me  
13 this opportunity. I'm very passionate about  
14 this program. I was a VISTA volunteer for two  
15 years and this was my project and it has worked  
16 very well for the people in South Dade,  
17 Florida. Thank you very much.

18 MS. FERRADAZ: Good afternoon. My name is  
19 Gilda Ferradaz. I'm the director of programs  
20 with the Department of Children and Families  
21 here in Miami, District 11. I'm speaking on  
22 behalf of the district and also on behalf of  
23 the central office in Tallahassee who is not  
24 able to attend here this afternoon.

25 Of the six USDA programs that are being

1 reviewed for reauthorization, my remarks today  
2 will focus on the Food Stamp Program. The  
3 Florida Department of Children and Family is  
4 committed to providing services to help Food  
5 Stamp recipients and those eligible to make  
6 informed decisions to choose healthy foods and  
7 lead active lifestyles.

8 Two projects currently in operation within  
9 DCF are the Food Stamp Nutrition Education  
10 Project and the State Nutrition Action Plan.  
11 Florida's Food Stamp Nutrition Education  
12 Project began in 1996 with a contract with the  
13 University of Florida's cooperative extension  
14 service to provide nutrition education to  
15 eligible low income audiences.

16 The University of Florida's cooperative  
17 extension services currently is the only  
18 provider of Food Stamp nutrition education in  
19 Florida and is active in 22 counties.

20 The mid year report for project year 2005  
21 shows over 166,000 clients have been directly  
22 served by Food Stamp nutrition education  
23 activities. Social marketing and other  
24 indirect contacts such as newspaper articles,  
25 radio, newsletters and displays has reached an

1 additional 376,000 clients.

2 Evaluation of those participating in depth  
3 lessons show greater than 70 percent of the  
4 participants demonstrate increases in dietary  
5 quality, shopping behavior and food resource  
6 management and general nutrition.

7 Considering the time and effort required  
8 by state and local staff to prepare and  
9 administer an annual 50 percent reimbursement  
10 budget for the Food Stamp Nutrition Education  
11 State Plan and the time and effort spent by  
12 USDA with all aspects regarding the budget,  
13 perhaps it would be cost effective to consider  
14 a different funding motto, such as the one used  
15 for the expanded food and nutrition program.

16 Without the need to solicit documents and  
17 report income, service to support direct  
18 spending projects would have greater  
19 flexibility to target locations that provide  
20 activity to Food Stamp recipients and those  
21 likely or potentially eligible.

22 The Food Stamp Interagency Food and  
23 Nutrition committee provides oversight to the  
24 state nutrition action plan activities.

25 The Florida Interagency Food and Nutrition

1 Committee is a multi-agency committee that in  
2 part has representation from each state agency  
3 that administers USDA/FNS Programs.

4 One of the primary roles of the Florida  
5 Interagency Food and Nutrition Committee is the  
6 creation of a common nutrition message that can  
7 be promoted by all members of the Florida  
8 Interagency Food and Nutrition Committee.

9 An example of successful activities and  
10 campaigns are the low fat or fat free milk, 5 A  
11 Day the Florida Way and Snack Smart, Move More.  
12 The next campaign will kick off in early 2006  
13 and will focus on serving size. Be Wise About  
14 Your Portion Size.

15 From a federal perspective, our  
16 recommendation is to continue to stress the  
17 importance of snack activities and encourage  
18 states to expand their efforts in this regard.  
19 This will assist in raising awareness of the  
20 snack activity in each state and reinforce the  
21 need to support these projects.

22 These two projects demonstrate the  
23 department's commitment to promote good  
24 nutrition in Florida, working cooperatively  
25 with other state and federal agencies in an

1 efficient way to maximize our resources and  
2 convey consistent behavior nutrition messages  
3 to the citizens of our state. Thank you.

4 MS. GREENFIELD: Good afternoon. My name  
5 is Valory Greenfield. I'm a staff attorney  
6 with Florida Legal Services for (inaudible) for  
7 25 legal services individual programs  
8 throughout the state. I'm located here in  
9 Miami, Florida. I'm here on behalf of those  
10 advocates working at those programs who assist  
11 Food Stamp applicants and participants.

12 Our comments today concern privatization  
13 of the technological improvement in the  
14 eligibility determination component of the  
15 Florida's Food Stamp program. In Florida the  
16 Department of Children and Family is  
17 implementing its vision for an improved future  
18 called modernization.

19 Modernization boosts public assistance  
20 program access to technology based methods  
21 supported by a wide variety of private entry  
22 points which are not run by the state.

23 Modernization relies on outsourced  
24 community partners to handle most application  
25 and reapplication aspects of Food Stamps as

1 well as (inaudible) and Medicaid.

2 DCF has passed the community with  
3 distributing and accepting paper application,  
4 maintaining computer terminals where people can  
5 electronically apply or recertify, and  
6 providing access to equipment such as drop  
7 boxes, phones, copiers, digital images and fax  
8 machines so that documents could be submitted  
9 to DCF mechanically or through intermediaries  
10 instead of in person by clients.

11 Modernization relies on technology  
12 additionally through web based application  
13 sites and delivering customer service through  
14 the internet, as well as centralized call  
15 centers with automated phone systems and  
16 integrated voice response on a 24/7 basis.

17 For clients who need special assistance in  
18 applying or recertifying, in-person assistance  
19 might be available through community partners  
20 depending upon what level of service the  
21 partner has agreed to take on. Alternatively,  
22 individualized systems might be rendered at DCF  
23 satellite offices.

24 Contracting out this function to private  
25 vendors is also a possibility where there is no

1 DCF satellite office and no community partner  
2 is involved because of liability, conflict of  
3 interest or cost sharing concerns.

4 DCF's current plan technically keeps the  
5 final eligibility determination in-house, at  
6 least for now, at DCF Hub Centers, which are  
7 supposed to be technologically linked with  
8 community partners in order to provide instant  
9 access as needed.

10 As part of modernization, DCF has been  
11 systematically closing offices or scaling back  
12 to satellite shell offices. At least 30  
13 offices have already been closed or are slated  
14 for imminent closures. In other locals most or  
15 all case workers have already been laid off en  
16 masse and only a shell office remains as a  
17 repository.

18 In surveys we did in counties where there  
19 have been layoffs or office closures people had  
20 some very compelling complaints about  
21 modernization.

22 A Food Stamp participant in De Funiak  
23 Springs says, "My office closed. I have no  
24 transportation to get to the nearest office,  
25 nor did they tell me where the nearest office

1 is."

2 In Panama City, "Sometime in the fall the  
3 cases were moved to Jacksonville. Now it takes  
4 a couple of times to get my calculations  
5 correct. They seem to lose the faxes."

6 In Crestview, Florida. "The couple of  
7 workers who are at Jobs Plus will not see  
8 anyone unless they are applying. You can't ask  
9 them any questions."

10 Another Food Stamp participant, "You must  
11 come in and put all papers within a brown  
12 envelope and drop it off in a drop box, but you  
13 can't see a worker. Instead of talking to  
14 someone while you are in the office, they make  
15 you call the customer service for everything."

16 In Chipley, Florida, "I can't go pick up  
17 and drop off papers because I can't afford the  
18 gas to get there. You don't have one person to  
19 talk to who is familiar with your case. You  
20 speak with a different worker and they don't  
21 know what's going on. I have to call an  
22 automated system and I don't know any answers  
23 to the questions asked on the automated  
24 system."

25 In Ft. Walton Beach, "I never get the same

1 caseworker and I keep being told by each one  
2 something different."

3 And finally in Crestview, Florida, "Poor  
4 people don't have computers and most rely on  
5 help from real people, but you can't get help  
6 except by telephone. We need a local office."

7 These folks were using the phone. They  
8 didn't even try to use DCF's web-based  
9 application site, which generated this  
10 interesting exchange between two legal services  
11 attorneys. Attorney one: Have you guys seen  
12 this, the access website? I swear it wasn't  
13 there yesterday. Attorney two: I couldn't get  
14 it to load, could you? Attorney one: It  
15 checked my configuration and then said the page  
16 cannot load. Attorney two: I was really going  
17 to try to test it, but the page wouldn't load.  
18 I'm not sure if that's DCF's fault or my  
19 computer's fault. Attorney one: Here is a  
20 link to some known errors and how to fix them  
21 if your operating system is XP. Good if you  
22 know how to work a computer. Very complex  
23 instructions for someone with limited reading  
24 and computer skills. Anyway, after I  
25 downloaded the Windows XP service pack and then

1 downloaded Active X Software I was still only  
2 able to get to Page 3 of the application. I'm  
3 not even on an XP platform. I use Windows  
4 2000, says attorney two. There is no help  
5 information for that.

6 It's no wonder that DCF's web-based  
7 Interactive Access Application has been  
8 significantly challenged by an eligible  
9 disabled caregiver who was unable to use it to  
10 apply online. The case remains pending and the  
11 Access Program is being revised for deployment  
12 in 2006. I'm getting a one-minute signal, so  
13 if you will indulge me.

14 Our message today is that Florida Legal  
15 Services advocates believe that the current  
16 waiver (inaudible) and policy options must  
17 continue in order to insure the overall  
18 structure of the program, even while states are  
19 asking for flexibility in the delivery of  
20 benefits.

21 While improved customer service through  
22 the Internet and other emerging technologies  
23 are important opportunities, it is also  
24 important to insure that these technologies are  
25 fully available to those without access to or

1 the skills to manipulate technology as well as  
2 the limited English proficient, the disabled  
3 and the transportation disadvantage.

4 It's equally important to insure that all  
5 of these vulnerable individuals still have  
6 access to local offices with trained staff or  
7 face-to-face assistance when needed.

8 Florida's modernization experience, as I  
9 have explained today, actively demonstrates  
10 just how critical an issue this is for people.

11 The Food Stamp program does enormous good.  
12 Its national structure and federal guarantee of  
13 benefits are critical to ameliorating hunger  
14 and poverty and responding to economic  
15 downturns. It must be preserved and  
16 accessible. Thank you very much for the  
17 opportunity to speak.

18 MR. BOST: Thank you.

19 MS. WEST: Hello. My name is Denise West  
20 and I am the Public Health Nutrition Program  
21 Director for the WIC and Nutrition Program for  
22 the Miami-Dade County Health Department.

23 Our Health Department mission is to  
24 promote and protect the health of our community  
25 through prevention and preparedness. Emergency

1 preparedness and the importance of a rapid  
2 coordinated response from federal nutrition  
3 programs to state and local communities during  
4 a disaster or public health emergency is the  
5 subject of my remarks today.

6 As the Health Department Nutrition Program  
7 we are required to complete a Continuity Of  
8 Operation Plan also known as COOP. These are  
9 federal requirements that are now coming down.

10 This plan needs to address our response to  
11 natural disasters, such as a hurricane that  
12 might be occurring any minute now in Dade or  
13 any day now, as well as potential natural or  
14 manmade biological threats, such as an anthrax  
15 release or a pandemic outbreak of Avian Flu.

16 We are finding few answers to the  
17 questions we are raising locally to plan for  
18 maintaining the nutrition needs of our  
19 citizens, but tearfully vulnerable infants and  
20 children.

21 I would like to pose a few of these  
22 questions so that on the federal level you all  
23 can begin to think about how we could begin to  
24 respond. And maybe this will have some impact  
25 on some legislative or regulation changes that

1 need to be made to address this in the future.  
2 Hopefully we will never need it, but we are  
3 having to plan, so I think it's important that  
4 we think.

5 For example, following a major natural  
6 disaster such as Andrew or Katrina, how can we  
7 assure a safe form of infant formula is  
8 positioned to be immediately delivered along  
9 with ice and water? Non-breast fed babies who  
10 need formulas every few hours have an immediate  
11 critical need for formula. Following Hurricane  
12 Andrew, and I was very much involved in this,  
13 we experienced a flood of callers from both WIC  
14 and non WIC families needing formula because  
15 of unsafe water, lack of refrigeration, and  
16 subsequent spoilage, and a damage  
17 infrastructure to retail stores, so they were  
18 not even each able to go out and purchase  
19 formula.

20 WIC, the Commodity Supplemental Food  
21 Program and TEFAP need flexible regulation to  
22 enable variable responses based on the  
23 situation. Often to ensure FEMA reimbursement  
24 orders are replaced following a disaster  
25 assessment and supplies arrive 36 to 48 hours

1 or even later to a community. This may not be  
2 enough time for infants.

3 Another possibility in a large quarantine  
4 situation. Perhaps a plane load of passengers  
5 with a smallpox or SARS exposure on that plane  
6 would have to be quarantined. How and who  
7 would pay to feed and house these individuals?  
8 Can USDA Nutrition Program supply food,  
9 including baby formula? Although those  
10 quarantined may not be eligible for program  
11 benefits, would FEMA reimburse in this  
12 situation?

13 Another concern in response to a pandemic  
14 where exposed individuals and families may be  
15 quarantined in a home, how can we assure food  
16 to families, especially infants and children,  
17 who may lack the support system to assist them?  
18 Can WIC, TEFAP and the Commodity Supplemental  
19 Food Program provide food and formula to  
20 quarantine homes although families may not meet  
21 program criteria and are not in a mass feeding  
22 situation? If not, how will these needs be  
23 met? How can we recertify and certify families  
24 in quarantine situations? How do we perform  
25 program eligibility determination when families

1 are not quarantined that are advised to  
2 minimize public exposure and don't want to come  
3 in to our offices when we require face-to-face  
4 proof of eligibility? Would these situations  
5 also be considered a disaster for FEMA  
6 reimbursement? The purpose of the National  
7 COOP Planning Effort is to identify essential  
8 functions and preplan to continue essential  
9 services with alternate operations. It is  
10 imperative that advanced dialogue involving all  
11 federal state and key local partners continue  
12 to focus on finding the best answers to these  
13 and other feeding-related questions, so that we  
14 can all be prepared working in concert for any  
15 type of a future disaster. Thank you.

16 MS. DEAN: Number 12?

17 MR. DENNINGER: I'm 13 but they said  
18 number 12 wasn't here.

19 MR. BOST: Lauren Daniel?

20 MR. DANIEL: Yes, I'm here, but I'm going  
21 to pass on that.

22 MR. DENNINGER: I'm Frank Denninger from  
23 Hialeah, Florida, a citizen of Florida in the  
24 U.S. I'm also here with a group called the  
25 Florida Outdoor Alliance in Collier County,

1 Florida on the West Coast, east of Naples. I  
2 don't know a lot about the Farm Bill. In fact  
3 I have one question, if you could confirm it  
4 for me, is this Public Law 104-127?

5 MR. BOST: What is the public law? Well,  
6 the Farm Bill is --

7 MR. DENNINGER: I've heard it referred to  
8 on some of these documents as the same thing.

9 MR. BOST: There are several titles that  
10 are part of the Farm Bill. The nutrition  
11 programs, there are six of them that are part  
12 of the Farm Bill that will be discussed by  
13 Congress in '07.

14 MR. DENNINGER: Okay, but the Farm Bill in  
15 general, isn't it going to be revised then?

16 MR. BOST: Yes, it is.

17 MR. DENNINGER: Oh, okay. Let me go on.  
18 I'm sorry. I'm getting my feet on the ground.

19 MR. BOST: Okay.

20 MR. DENNINGER: I support everything that  
21 I'm hearing here today. I didn't know the Farm  
22 Bill was so involved like it does. I guess  
23 this is the forum to mention it directly but I  
24 guess the Farm Bill also has a lot to do with  
25 conservation and the Everglades restoration in

1 fact. And in fact the Everglades restoration,  
2 I think, Section 29 includes \$300 million  
3 annually or totally to be expended for the  
4 Everglades system. It may be additional or  
5 part of 4 million, but in any case the  
6 experience the local people have had in South  
7 Florida from the East to the West Coast due to  
8 Farm Bill money being accessed by the State of  
9 Florida has basically been, in my opinion and  
10 many others, the removal of sovereignty from  
11 the State Land, the benefit of the money that  
12 came from the Farm Bill in order to get the  
13 money. The way I believe it was done was with  
14 a framework agreement done way before any legal  
15 processes that I ever became aware of where the  
16 Department of Interior and the Corps of  
17 Engineers, along with our Florida Department of  
18 Environmental Protection and South Florida  
19 Water Management made the deal to get the  
20 Department of Interior and the Corps quite a  
21 bit of oversight on land management on the  
22 60,000 acres on the restoration project, the  
23 first Everglades restoration project.

24 And ever since then people have been told  
25 lots of reservation cannot be allowed in there

1       any more because of the stipulation of the use  
2       of Section 390.5, which are now the overseer of  
3       those funds and how they are used is the  
4       Protection and Wildlife Service of the United  
5       States and people are basically outraged.

6               Personally, I'm upset that my state, in my  
7       opinion, gave sovereignty away. I don't think  
8       that's legal. I think it's really bad and I  
9       have talked to attorneys and they have said  
10      frankly, it really wasn't sovereignty, and I  
11      said, whatever it was, it looked bad, it  
12      smelled bad and tasted bad.

13              The citizens weren't much involved in the  
14      whole process because it took place on October  
15      the 3rd 1996 and the development of the EIS's  
16      et cetera for the restoration took place here  
17      recently in the last couple of years. And in  
18      those 5 inches of documents there was only a  
19      couple of sentences referred to the FP3 Grant.  
20      And over the top of the state agency division  
21      of forces, they put (inaudible) in reality the  
22      final hammer comes down to the federal  
23      agencies.

24              And, you know, we call that -- people talk  
25      about federal trains -- I'm not really mad at

1 my federal government, because I am the federal  
2 government, but a lot of me did (inaudible)  
3 including me. I didn't catch it, but it should  
4 have been discussed. Things might have been  
5 done differently. And I would really  
6 appreciate it if there is some clause going to  
7 be put in the Farm Bill to prevent either  
8 sovereignty -- and I just kind of found out  
9 recently and rushed over and we don't get an  
10 opportunity in part of the people to talk.

11 I've since suggested to the state to give the  
12 38 million back. I appreciate you being here  
13 and taking the time to hear our concerns.

14 Thank you.

15 MS. WARD: Good afternoon. My name is  
16 Janet Ward. I'm the president and CEO of an  
17 organization called Parents Information and  
18 Resource Center, known as PIRC.

19 We are a community mental health center up  
20 in the Lighthouse Point, Pompano Beach area of  
21 Broward County. And I came here really for two  
22 purposes. One was to talk about the issues  
23 that we face in trying to go through the  
24 application process to become a -- to receive  
25 services of food through from the Department of

1       Agriculture.

2               And the second one was to see if we could  
3       get some assistance in terms of feeding the  
4       clients, the mentally ill clients that we  
5       service at our center.

6               In 1992 I started this organization to  
7       help parents and children who are in need of  
8       services helping to maintain self-sufficiency  
9       and over the years we have been evolving to a  
10       community mental health center and we are a  
11       partial day hospital program funded by Medicaid  
12       and Medicare A and B.

13              Part of the issue that we face is that we  
14       do a full day program. Our clients are with us  
15       primarily four or more hours a day, and part of  
16       the issue is how to feed them while some of  
17       them come in early in the morning. They get  
18       there at 7:30 and they are with us until 2:00,  
19       3:00 in the afternoon or even later at times.

20              Many of them are on various kinds of  
21       medication for diabetes, high blood pressure  
22       and so forth and they need to eat. None of the  
23       services that we provide is paid for -- pays  
24       for food for them. So we are providing the  
25       food out of our budget. And it's becoming such

1 a costly expenditure for us to provide food  
2 each day.

3 In January we anticipate moving to a  
4 larger location, taking on much more clients,  
5 and the issue of how we feed them each day,  
6 because they do need to eat when they are with  
7 us, is becoming an ever growing problem for us.

8 We had tried to go through the Department  
9 of Agriculture process to receive food under  
10 the food program that you guys have, and it's  
11 been very, very challenging to us. So we  
12 wanted to -- I wanted to ask if there is a way  
13 that the system could be a little more  
14 user-friendly, that we have somebody assigned  
15 to hold our hand, so to speak, through the  
16 process.

17 The other thing that I wanted to see if  
18 there is anyone here who currently knew a food  
19 program in Broward County, if there was a way  
20 that we could get food to provide to these  
21 clients, because we would have to give them  
22 something to eat, especially since the majority  
23 of them receive medication from us.

24 We have the nurse practitioner. We have  
25 three psychiatrists. We have another

1 registered nurse who takes care of them during  
2 the day. Many of the people have stepped down  
3 from inpatient hospitalization in psychiatric  
4 hospitals to come to us for the day programs,  
5 and so that's what we are looking for, somebody  
6 to guide us and direct us as to how to get  
7 through this process.

8 MR. BOST: Did everyone who was interested  
9 in speaking speak? Is there someone else here  
10 that would like to say something before I close  
11 this out? We would like to take this  
12 opportunity to thank you all for coming.

13 As I said earlier, what will happen is  
14 that we will roll these comments up into other  
15 comments that we have received from all over  
16 the country. There are about five or six more  
17 forums that are scheduled around the country.  
18 The next one being in Portland, Oregon next  
19 Tuesday. And so towards the end of this year  
20 you will be able to go to our website and see  
21 the other comments that were shared.

22 This is essentially the beginning of the  
23 process. We will take all the comments. We  
24 will discuss them internally. I would look at  
25 make some final decisions relative to

1        recommendations that we are interested in  
2        presenting to Congress that would reflect the  
3        administration's position regarding the  
4        reauthorization of these programs.

5                We have gotten an early start in terms of  
6        beginning that process because Congress won't  
7        consider these until the '07 Farm Bill debate,  
8        which is only a year away, but time goes  
9        quickly. The most important thing that I want  
10       to mention to you is that if you have  
11       additional comments that you are interested in  
12       making, you can always send those to us in the  
13       mail and I think we will have addresses.

14               A couple of things in response to some of  
15        the comments that were made, a couple of things  
16        that I want to mention to you in closing. The  
17        nutrition programs in this country that I'm  
18        responsible for, I heard people talk about  
19        resources dedicated to the nutrition program.  
20        Since I have become secretary we are the only  
21        agent in the federal government that has not  
22        seen a decrease in our budget. There has been  
23        an increase every single year.

24               The second thing is that we have done more  
25        outreach to enroll eligible people in our

1 program than any administration over the course  
2 of the last 25 years. We have seen an increase  
3 in the number of eligible people in almost a  
4 million people just in WIC alone. And just  
5 this year alone our budget will probably go  
6 from 52 billion to almost 58 billion dollars.

7 I grew up in the South and -- my mother  
8 has this expression where talk is cheap. I  
9 think that we have truly demonstrated our  
10 commitment to programs in insuring, as I see  
11 it, that eligible people that are interested in  
12 participating in our programs have the  
13 opportunity to do so.

14 Many of you talked about making it easier  
15 to wade through the issue of the paperwork  
16 banks. That's something that is very -- that  
17 is something that we have also dedicated a  
18 great deal of time and interest to also. We  
19 are very interested in insuring that we strike  
20 the balance. The balance being on the one  
21 hand, people that are interested in enrolling  
22 in our programs that are eligible, that it's  
23 easy for them.

24 On the other hand, we are also interested  
25 in insuring that people that have the

1       responsibility for implementing our programs  
2       that it's easy for them to do that.  And I'm  
3       also looking that we don't compromise that  
4       level of integrity for those people that are  
5       eligible and those people that have the  
6       responsibility for managing those programs.

7               And one of the things that I will tell you  
8       that I have said in a couple of the forums is  
9       the fact that I have people who come to me,  
10       especially the agency providers who say to me,  
11       Mr. Secretary, why don't you do away with this  
12       paperwork?  Why don't you do this so it's  
13       easier for us to implement our program?  And we  
14       say, yeah, we'll make it easier and then  
15       inevitably we do away with some of those  
16       requirements and inevitably someone does  
17       something that they are not supposed to do, and  
18       then there is -- the Miami Herald does a big  
19       expose.  Congress calls me to testify.  I get a  
20       spanking.  I call you and I say to you, didn't  
21       ya'll ask me to do this?  You are no nowhere to  
22       be found.  You are back there behind me, but  
23       when I'm on the Hill and those great folks in  
24       Florida said, this would make it so easy for  
25       people to enroll in the program.  It would mean

1       so much less paperwork and they say well  
2       Mr. Bost, where are those people? And I say  
3       well, they are not here today. They couldn't  
4       come to D.C. and get this spanking with me.

5               We are very sensitive to that. We are  
6       always looking for those opportunities, but I  
7       am not going to compromise the integrity of our  
8       programs because it might make it easier for  
9       you. If it makes it easier for you and does  
10       not compromise the integrity of our programs,  
11       then absolutely and we are very, very, open to  
12       any suggestions that anyone has about our  
13       programs.

14               Again, thank you so very much for being  
15       here. We appreciate your comments and have a  
16       very safe and good afternoon. Thank you.